CHAPTER XIX

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND EDUCATION

ONE range of topics remains to be treated in our survey of Chinese history and culture—namely, language, literature, and education. Part of the proper contents of this chapter has been included earlier, under other subjects. More than one phase of literature has already been discussed and education has been touched upon both in the chapter on government, where the civil service examinations, the goal of so much of the educational system, were described, and in that on religion, where the preparation given Buddhist monks was briefly summarized. The present chapter, therefore, will describe only those features of the subjects which head it as have not been covered elsewhere.

THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE

The Chinese language is the mother tongue of more people than is any other on the face of the earth, and, indeed, of more than have spoken any other language at any one time in the history of the race. Even its most prevalent form, *mandarin,* probably surpasses all other tongues in the number of those who employ it in the daily affairs of life. English, French, and possibly Russian have a wider geographic spread, but none is the primary language of so large a proportion of the world's population.

To the Westerner the Chinese language is at the outset most disconcerting, for it does not fit into many of the patterns to which he is accustomed. One of the most striking

of the dissimilarities is that which exists between the spoken and much of the written language. The vernacular may be and more than once has been reduced to writing. An interesting and influential movement of the present day, as we have seen, is toward the production of a much larger proportion of the literature in a standardized form of the most widely spoken of the colloquials. On the